

# Sun Tzu and the Art of Stakeholder Involvement

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*Sun Tzu's The Art of War was written in 500 BCE and remains the quintessential doctrine on strategic and tactical planning for war. According to Sun Tzu, the most effective strategy for victory is not to enter battle at all. The Department of Defense (DOD) is facing a new "battlefield," as encroachment and unexploded ordnance issues are threatening the military's ability to train. Applying Sun Tzu's tenets to this new battlefield allows the DOD to avoid the legal, regulatory, and public opinion "battle" by building and maintaining effective relationships with those most affected by range and training activities. Sun Tzu says, "Know your enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril." In today's world, understanding the "enemy," whether it be interests outside the fence, inside the fence, or personal value systems is essential to building and maintaining the relationships necessary to declare "victory" on sustainable ranges. © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.*

## INTRODUCTION

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, written in approximately 500 BCE, remains a standard for military operations around the world. In today's environment, the tenets of this masterpiece can also be applied to understanding and dealing with the public on controversial issues ranging from environmental cleanup to sustaining military training ranges. The military is face to face with the challenge of integrating diverse stakeholder interests into its decision making on several fronts. Today's value-based activists pose new challenges requiring different and innovative approaches from those used even ten years ago. By applying ancient

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wisdom, we can meet these new challenges and remain the world's greatest military force while serving as a model for community-based decision making.

### KNOW YOUR ENEMY

One of the most well known of Sun Tzu's concepts is the need to know your enemy—who he is, what his motives are, how he operates. Within the context of stakeholder involvement, the question becomes “Who is the enemy?” We submit that the enemy is whatever or whoever is keeping us from accomplishing our mission. The enemy can be those outside the fence—people and circumstances outside the installation boundaries that affect our ability to accomplish our goals. The enemy can be those inside the fence—commanders, engineers, and scientists who do not consider the political and social implications of their actions and decisions. And the enemy can be within our own minds—our own beliefs and values that stand in the way of fully considering all sides of an issue. Knowing the enemy, whichever form it takes, is essential to victory.



*The enemy can be those outside the fence . . . the enemy can be those inside the fence . . . And the enemy can be within our own minds . . .*

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### THE NEW “BATTLEFIELD”

The “battlefield” for the military has changed significantly in recent years. With the end of the Cold War and the draft, the average American's experience with the military and its needs decreased. A full generation has grown up without the draft, and many American families today have no experience with military service. The once highly respected “national defense” barrier no longer exists. With a proliferation of access to information, Americans increasingly demand open, transparent, and inclusive processes for determining what is important for them. The urbanization of previously remote training sites has led to new issues with neighbors that did not exist even five years ago. In many cases, the Department of Defense (DOD) is ill equipped to deal with activists who may have an agenda that includes complete removal of the military from an area.

The newest and most important battlefield for the military is that of sustainable training ranges. To conduct effective training for military readiness, the DOD must maintain the ability to realistically train troops. Encroachment issues and unexploded ordnance issues are threatening the military's ability to continue realistic training.

The DOD needs to mount an effective “battle plan” to maintain readiness. Using the tenets of Sun Tzu to build that battle plan is crucial to “victory,” not only for the military, but also for all stakeholders in the process.

### VICTORY

*Sun Tzu says: “Victory is the main object in war. . . those skilled in war subdue the enemy's army without battle. They capture his cities without assaulting them and overthrow his state without protracted operations.”*

Within the context of stakeholder involvement, Sun Tzu's message is clear: Avoid the legal and public opinion battle before it gets started! Engage early and effectively with the "enemy" and destroy the means to do battle against you. The leader must



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- "Attack the enemy's strategy"
  - Gather intelligence about the issues, concerns, and interests of all stakeholders in the process;
  - Analyze the information to determine the effects of diverse agendas and values, including your own, on mission accomplishment;
  - Use the information to plan for and respond to issues before they arise.
- "Attack his alliances"
  - Be open and responsive to all stakeholder concerns, treating everyone's opinion with respect;
  - Bring those in the middle to your side by being willing to enter into give-and-take dialogue with all parties;
  - Level the playing field by building collaborative relationships with key leaders in the community.
- "Attack his army"
  - This is the last resort and is least likely to succeed.

#### IF YOU MUST DO BATTLE

*Sun Tzu says: "War is a matter of vital importance to the State. . . . Therefore, appraise it in terms of the five fundamental factors. . . . The first of these factors is moral influence; the second, weather; the third, terrain; the fourth, command; and the fifth, doctrine."*

**Moral Influence** (Moral Law): "that which causes the people to be in harmony with their leaders so they will accompany them in life and unto death without fear of mortal peril."

In stakeholder involvement, "moral influence" can be defined in terms of returning to harmony. The leader must

- listen to all sides of the issue and respect all stakeholder opinions;
- not take opposing views as personal attacks;
- involve all stakeholders to integrate technical, legal, social, economic, and political interests in the decision process;
- identify and achieve common goals; and
- identify mutual gains.

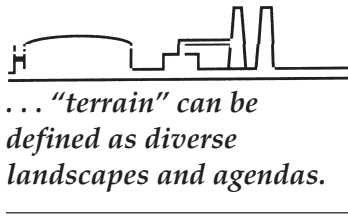
**Weather:** "the interaction of natural forces, the effects of winter's cold and summer's heat and the conduct of military operations in accordance with the seasons."

In stakeholder involvement, "weather" can be defined in terms of political climate. The leader must

- understand the context within which an issue is being viewed;
- know which way the “wind” is really blowing;
- conduct an honest risk analysis of the political threat; and
- anticipate and respond *before* issues arise, knowing when interests and concerns change, and being flexible in approaches.

**Terrain:** “distances, whether the ground is traversed with ease or difficulty, whether it is open or constricted, and the chances of life or death.”

In stakeholder involvement, “terrain” can be defined as diverse landscapes and agendas. The leader must



- identify key terrain and avenues of approach, which includes identifying, analyzing, and anticipating stakeholder issues and concerns;
- identify obstacles to success, such as budgets, people, availability of expertise, and political realities; and
- seek the moral high ground by establishing a well-run organization and an open and inclusive process.

**Command:** “the general’s qualities of wisdom, sincerity, humanity, courage, and strictness.”

In stakeholder involvement, “command” can be defined in terms of toughness, inclusiveness, and flexibility. The leader must

- be able to “walk in another’s shoes,” understanding diverse stakeholder values and demonstrating willingness to incorporate DOD and non-DOD stakeholder interests into decisions;
- be able to anticipate issues and concerns and react accordingly, analyzing emerging situations and having the flexibility to change direction to respond effectively; and
- be able to make sometimes unpopular risk-management decisions, based not solely on technical merit, but also considering political and social values important to non-DOD stakeholders.

**Doctrine:** “organization, control, assignment of appropriate ranks to officers, regulation of supply routes, and the provision of principal items used by the army.”

In stakeholder involvement, “doctrine” can be defined in terms of ability to facilitate solutions that allow the mission to move forward. The leader must

- understand laws, regulations, and policies;
- manage all aspects of the campaign and understand the “big picture;”
- manage the “supply route”—release information early, including “bad” news;

- understand the DOD culture and the civilian culture, and apply DOD doctrine with flexibility; and
- ensure proper “provisions”—incorporate stakeholder involvement activities into the schedule and plan for it, provide adequate resources, and assign appropriate expertise and training on risk management, conflict resolution, facilitation, mediation, and effective communication.

## CONCLUSION

*Sun Tzu says: “Know your enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. . . . If ignorant of your enemy and of yourself you are certain in every battle to be in peril.”*

Today’s military must create a victory to sustain training ranges and maintain superior readiness of U.S. forces. They must do that by building effective relationships with those inside and outside the fence, and by shifting historic mindsets to be flexible, open, and inclusive of political, social and economic values important to those involved in the issues. By following the ancient wisdom of Sun Tzu, the U.S. military will remain strong, the democratic process will flourish, and the interests of this nation will be well served. ❖